

CLAIMS

1. A multimedia transaction processor for facilitating the sale of multimedia material, said apparatus comprising

5 a media server operable to store multimedia material from at least one vendor, meta data representing the content of the multimedia material and data identifying the vendor providing the multimedia material, said meta data and said identifying data being stored in association with said multimedia material,

10 a communications processor connectable, via a communications link, to one or more data processing systems and operable to receive, via said communications link, from one of said data processing systems, data indicative of a request for multimedia content from a buyer,

15 an access processor operable to retrieve from said server possible multimedia material content items corresponding to said requested multimedia content by generating meta data from said data requesting said multimedia content and comparing said generated meta data with the meta data stored in association with said multimedia material, and from the comparison retrieving said possible multimedia content items from said server, and to communicate to the buyer data processing system data representative of said possible multimedia content items, and

20 a transaction controller operable, in response to selection data representative of a selection of at least one of said possible multimedia content items from said buyer, to communicate to said vendor identified by said stored identification, data ordering said selected multimedia content items, and to complete a sales transaction for the selected multimedia material with the buyer.

25 2. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said meta data comprises a plurality of different types, each different type of said meta data describing a different aspect of said multimedia content.

30 3. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in Claims 1 or 2, wherein the multimedia material stored in said media server is arranged to include impairments.

4. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in Claim 3, wherein said impairments are produced by generating a reduced quality representation of the material, to the effect that an amount of data required to represent the multimedia
5 material is substantially reduced.

5. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim,
wherein said selection data includes an indication of a selected part of said selected
10 multimedia item, said communications processor being operable in combination with
said transaction controller to complete said sales transaction by debiting an amount of
money corresponding to said selected part of said media item, with respect to the total
cost of said selected media item.

6. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim,
15 wherein said server is arranged to store business rules data representative of the
conditions for the sale of said selected multimedia material items, said access
processor communicating said conditions of sale data to said buyer in response to one
of said selection data and said requesting data.

20 7. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim,
wherein said access processor is operable in response to said selection data to generate
and to store data representing the number of times buyers select said multimedia
material items.

25 8. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in Claim 7, wherein said
access processor is operable to determine the number of times multimedia content
items owned by a particular vendor are selected by said buyers, and said
communications processor is operable in combination with said access processor to
communicate on request, data representative of said number of times said multimedia
30 content items are selected, to said particular vendor providing said multimedia content.

9. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim, wherein said access processor is operable to receive catalogue data representing a list of multimedia material items provided by a vendor divided into predetermined categories, said catalogue data being communicated on request to a buyer data processing system.

10. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim, wherein said media server is arranged to store data representative of advertising material, and said access processor is operable to communicate said advertising data to said buyer data processing system in response to said request data.

11. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any of Claims 2 to 10, wherein said request data comprises at least one data value and an indication of which of said types of meta data said data value corresponds, said access processor being operable to search said server for said possible multimedia content items by searching for values corresponding to said data value for said meta data type corresponding to said indication.

12. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any of Claims 2 to 10, wherein said access processor is operable to generate at least one meta data value for at least one meta data type from said request data, and to retrieve said possible multimedia content items by searching said server for multimedia content items having meta data values corresponding to said at least one generated meta data value.

13. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim, wherein said access processor is operable to compare said request data with meta data stored in said server and to retrieve meta data which corresponds with said request data, and to operate in combination with said communications processor to communicate said retrieved meta data to said buyer data processing systems, said access processor being operable to retrieve multimedia content items corresponding to selected retrieved meta data received from a buyer user data processing system.

14. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim, wherein said transaction controller includes an account management system operable to store data representative of bank accounts of said buyer and said vendor, and consequent upon receipt of said selection data, to complete said transaction by
5 transferring money to be charged to said bank account of said vendor from the bank account of said buyer, said amount of money being determined in dependence upon said pre-stored cost of buying said selected multimedia content items.

10 15. A multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim, wherein said multimedia material includes one of data, video data, audio data and
audio/video data.

15 16. A multimedia processing system comprising
a multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any preceding Claim,
a plurality of data processing systems coupled to said transaction processor via
a data communications network.

20 17. A multimedia processing system as claimed in Claim 15, wherein said data communications network includes the Internet.

18. A method of vending multimedia material, said method comprising the steps of

- identifying said multimedia material to be sold,
- generating meta data describing the content of said multimedia material,
- generating data representing a predetermined price for the sale of said multimedia material,
- associating data representative of the owner of said multimedia material, with said multimedia material and said meta data,
- arranging for said multimedia material, said meta data, said ownership data and said predetermined price for sale to be ingested by the media server of the multimedia transaction processor of any of claims 1 to 15,
- arranging for buyers to establish a transaction account,

- providing a facility for said buyers to preview said multimedia material, to select desired items of multimedia material and to complete a transaction for said selected multimedia material items using said transaction account,
 - arranging for said vendor to communicate said selected multimedia material
- 5 items to said buyers.

19. A method of buying multimedia material using the transaction processor according to any of Claims 1 to 15, comprising the steps of

- establishing an account with the account management system of said
- 10 multimedia transaction processor,
- communicating data representative of a request for a desired multimedia material item to said transaction processor via a data communications network,
- receiving possible multimedia material items from said transaction processor,
- previewing said possible multimedia material items,
- selecting desired multimedia items,
- communicating data representative of said selection to said transaction
- 15 processor,
- completing a transaction for the purchase of said selected multimedia material items, and
- arranging for the owner of said multimedia material to communicate said
- 20 selected material items to said buyer.

20. A multimedia transaction processor comprising:

- a media storage server storing a plurality of media items and data
- 25 representative of one or more respective proprietors of rights relating to each item;
- a data communications link;
- one or more user data processing systems connectable via the data link to the
- media storage server, each user data processing system having means for identifying,
- to the media server, a user of that data processing system and to communicate request
- 30 data to the media storage server representative of a request to transfer selected
- multimedia items stored in said media storage server to the requesting user data
- processing system, wherein said media storage server is operable, in response to said

request data to transfer a multimedia item, to compare the identity of the requesting user with the proprietors of rights relating to the requested media item and, in the event that the user of the data processing system is not the proprietor of rights relating to the requested media item, to generate charging information relating to a charge to that user
5 for transfer of the requested multimedia item.

21. A transaction processor as claimed in Claim 20, wherein the multimedia items are audio/video or image media items.

10 22. A transaction processor as claimed in Claim 20 or Claim 21, wherein said media storage server is operable to maintain a copy of the requested media item at the storage server when a transfer to a user data processing system is made.

15 23. A transaction processor as claimed in any of Claim 20 to 22, wherein the media storage server is operable to transfer the requested media item irrespective of the identity of the user of the client data processing system issuing the request.

20 24. A transaction processor as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 23, wherein said media storage server is operable to store data representing a list of users to which transfers of the media items are authorised, the storage server not transferring a media item to a user if that user does not appear on the list of authorised users for that media item.

25 25. A media storage server for storing a plurality of media items and ownership data representative of one or more respective proprietors of rights relating to each item, and charging data representative of the cost of selling said media items; said media storage server being connectable via a data communications link to one or more user data processing system, each user data processing system having means for identifying, to the storage server, a user of that data processing system and to communicate request data representative of a request to transfer media items held at the storage server to that user data processing system; said media storage server being operable, in response to a request from a user data processing system to transfer a

media item, to compare the identity of the user of that user data processing system with the proprietors of rights relating to the requested media item and, in the event that the user of the data processing system is not the proprietor of rights relating to the requested media item, to generate charging information from said charging data relating to a charge to that user for transfer of the requested media item.

26. A method of media storage and retrieval, the method comprising the steps of:

- storing, at a media storage server, a plurality of media items, data representing one or more respective proprietors of rights relating to each item and charging data representative of the cost of selling said media items;

- connecting a user data processing system to the storage server via a data communications link;

- the user data processing system identifying, to the storage server, a user of that user data processing system;

- the user data processing system issuing requests to the storage server to transfer media items held at the storage server to that user data processing system;

- the media storage server, in response to request data representative of a request for multimedia material from a user data processing system to transfer a media item, comparing the identity of the requesting user data processing system with the proprietors of rights relating to the requested media item and, in the event that the requesting user data processing system is not the proprietor of rights relating to the requested media item, generating charging from the charging data information relating to a charge to that user for transfer of the requested media item.

27. A method of operation of a media system, the method comprising the steps of:

storing a plurality of media items and data representative of one or more respective proprietors of rights relating to each item;

connecting to a user data processing system via a data communications link;

receiving from the user data processing system data identifying, to the storage server, the requesting user data processing system;

receiving from the requesting user data processing system request data representative of a request to transfer multimedia data items from the media storage server to that user data processing system;

5 in response to a request from a user data processing system to transfer a media item, comparing the identity of the requesting user data processing system with the proprietors of rights relating to the requested media item and, in the event that the requesting user data processing system is not the proprietor of rights relating to the requested media item, generating charging information from said charging data relating to a charge to that user for transfer of the requested media item.

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28. A computer program providing computer executable instructions, which when loaded onto a computer configures the computer to operate as a multimedia transaction processor as claimed in any of Claims 1 to 15.

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29. A computer program providing computer executable instructions, which when loaded on to a computer causes the computer to perform the method according to Claims 18, 19, 26 or 27.

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30. A computer program product having a computer readable medium recorded thereon information signals representative of the computer program claimed in Claims 28 or 29.

31. A media storage and retrieval method substantially as herein before described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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32. A method of operation of a media storage system, the method being substantially as herein before described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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33. A multimedia transaction processor and a multimedia transaction system as herein before described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

34. A method of vending and a method of buying multimedia material as herein before described with reference to the accompanying drawings.